“Tradition” as a Solution to the Crisis of Japanese Sake Industry

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Since ancient times, sake has played an important role in the Japanese culture. It has not just been drunk for pleasure, but for centuries was a significant component of religious and secular ceremonies, was offered to deities, and utilised in purification rituals.

However, a gap between the symbolic significance of sake in Japan and its popularity as a beverage is growing dramatically. The number of small local sake makers declines each year, and large producers in Hyogo and Kyoto are also facing hard times. With the rising popularity of wine, beer, and whisky, Japanese consumers seem to be abandoning their own, traditional drink. Few years ago, Japanese government officially recognized the sake industry as the so-called fukyo gyoshu (a depressed industry).

While facing this crisis, however, more and more Japanese sake makers manage to survive. In this paper, I will demonstrate various strategies that are employed by them in order to regain their share of the market. Some efforts are directed toward reviving traditional brewing methods; others concentrate on conquering overseas markets. Ironically, the declining popularity of sake leads to the revival of the traditional sake making, and may possibly result in the widening potential of its consumption.

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Immediacy and Cinema: Re-“appropriation” of the World through Films

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According to Bergson, in our daily life we see people and things around us through our framework of habits and language, and are thus separated from the immediate manifestation of the reality itself. For him, we can only restore immediacy through some activities exterior to our daily life, one of which —and probably the most remarkable— is art. And now the question is: can the cinema play such role? On the one hand, as W. Benjamin pointed it out, the cinema, for all the sensation of reality it creates, may rather deprives us of immediacy since it tends to show, instead of presenting us the living reality, nothing more than stereotyped images taken out of it. Nevertheless, we can also affirm —and Benjamin himself hinted at this possibility— that beside these corny images another cinema exists: there are films that break precisely with those clichés and offer us a fresh vision of reality. This cinema may well be called the "cinema of immediacy".

In this essay I study thus the "cinema of immediacy" that helps us recover the direct contact with things and people in our present day world. Through filmic works and spoken words of the directors like
Dreyer, Resnais, Perrault, Kiarostami and Iosseliani among others, I inquire into the creation process of such cinema (the encounter with the "phenomena" in the Bartokian sense, and the expression of that encounter), the necessities that emerge in that creation (to capture the "life" of reality and the birth of the words, as well as to display a whole series of signs in a Humean “medium” between sympathy and comparison creating at the same time the film’s own musicality of images).

But what, concretely, does this cinema of immediacy reveal to us in our present condition of life? It seems to me that these films, opening us to the immediate relations with things and people, free us—or at least free our glance—from this world governed everywhere by the property rights. In effect, nowadays almost every relation is mediated, in some way or another, by legal rights and economic relations, to such an extent that we nearly forget that the world also existed before it has been transformed into a mass of legal-economic relations. But here the cinema of immediacy, certainly, can give us back a fresh vision: the films of Ouedraogo, Ford, Kurosawa or Iosseliani, among other directors, approach this problematic and show us the importance of re-“appropriation” of the world by our own eyes and hands. But surely this is not a Utopian story. As recent Iosseliani’s films (Farewell, Home Sweet Home and Monday Morning) show clearly, we can’t but continue to live in this society governed by the property rights and economic relations: another world does not exist. Only, perhaps by way of some Pathos der Distanz, may we be allowed to re-“appropriate” our world, although keeping on with our actual condition of life.

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Film as Paradox

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Paradoxical situations have always something cinematic. The antique anecdote of "Achill and the turtle" e.g. is characterised by its narrative variety and extremely visual quality. Zenon told us a story about the temporal and spatial dimension of our perception as well as about the phenomenon of the movement. The Liar’s paradox ("What I say now is not true") illustrates the aspect of the selfreflection of a sentence. In a similar way the film often refers to its own being a fiction and a medium at the same time. A paradoxical statement puts its recipient into a feeling of dizziness. We recognise the uselessness of searching for a solution and reach the dead end of thinking. This feeling reminds of the experience of seeing a successful optical trick in the cinema. The sensual effect of paradox and film serves to integrate the recipient into their texture. This potential is based on the illusionary quality of paradoxical expression.

My text analyses the paradox, which is the foundation for the structural and aesthetic manifestation of the cinematic fiction. The cinematic paradox is to be defined in categories of time, space, movement, selfreflection, spectator’s position, intensity of illusionary quality and process of “metamorphosis” in its representation. The characteristic skills of film like cadrage, montage, camera movement etc. are to be